



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B



Jesus Heals a Blind Man, 1649, Gioacchino Assereto



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy continues the slow movement toward the fulfillment of Jesus' ministry that we will proclaim and manifest in the weeks ahead as the liturgical year winds down.
- ▶ Jesus is on the last stop before he enters Jerusalem. He meets the blind beggar Bartimaeus in Jericho and heals his blindness. This healing event is a proclamation of the arrival of the messianic reign of Christ and the fulfillment of his mission. "The blind see and the lame now walk!"
- ▶ Each week now we get closer and closer to the culmination of Jesus' saving work.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Jeremiah 31: 7-9

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ Today's reading from Jeremiah is filled with hopeful words of restoration for the people of Israel returning from exile in Babylon.
- ▶ The context for today's reading is the Babylonian captivity.
- ▶ God is eager and happy to restore his people—so much so that he wants to proclaim it to all the nations.
- ▶ God reaches out to his people much like a parent reaches out and loves his or her favored child.
- ▶ It is clear that the Jewish people are precious in God's eyes—they are truly his chosen ones.
- ▶ God was loath to punish the people as he did, but like every good parent his chastisement was necessary; it was tough love.
- ▶ He chastised them in hopes that their ordeal would bring them to see the error of their wayward ways and return to the covenant God forged with them.
- ▶ God's call was a clarion call to return from their sinful ways.
- ▶ Their wait was over; the time was upon them—the day of salvation had arrived—God was delivering them, forgiving them and restoring them.
- ▶ God's reversal of fortunes was in full swing. Good news and great rejoicing!
- ▶ Return from exile was the new Exodus!
- ▶ People will return from exile—Judah in the south and Israel in the north will be reunited.
- ▶ God's saving action is a benefit for all people but especially the marginalized members of society.
- ▶ Jeremiah wrote his exhortation with a pen dipped in exuberant hope; it is especially hopeful for the weakest members of the community—the blind (see the Gospel), the lame, nursing mothers, the sick and infirm.
- ▶ Restoration is a result of God's unmerited, completely gratuitous gift of grace.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ Why is hope such a wonderful virtue?
- ▶ What are you hoping for in your life?
- ▶ What does hope teach us?
- ▶ Do you believe that God can restore impossible situations?
- ▶ Have you ever experience God's action in an impossible situation?
- ▶ How do you feel about the Jewish understanding that God punishes people for their sins? Does God punish you for your sins?

(Catechists: Keep in mind that the Jewish people understood all life events ordained by God. Good things in life were a result of God's blessing for good behavior and bad things were a result of bad behavior. Jesus presented a new worldview of such things. God does not cause bad things and illness, etc. —God simply allows such things to work in and through us and invites transformation in the midst of them. Yet even today people think God punishes them for their sins so it is important to have this dialogue. We are often our own worst enemies by the choices we make.)

Second Reading: Hebrews 5: 1-6

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The author of Hebrews continues his teaching on the priesthood of Jesus.
- ▶ Today's reading affirms the focus of the last few weeks in which the author speaks of the High Priesthood of Jesus based on his humanity.
- ▶ The following assertions reiterate the teaching of previous weeks:
 - He is qualified to be High Priest as he is a human being.
 - He understands the human condition; he knows its frailty and weakness.
 - He walked in the footsteps of the human community.
 - He knows human suffering; he knows human betrayal; he knows the human heart.
 - He knows what it means to be tempted. Jesus was tempted to abandon his mission and God's will for the salvation of the world.
 - He is like us in all things but sin.
- ▶ God appointed high priests for the purpose of priestly service.
- ▶ They were elected because they belonged to the tribe of Levi.
- ▶ God alone, on the other hand, elected Jesus.
- ▶ He was not from the tribe of Levi but he did not need that human designation.
- ▶ Jesus' qualification was his humanity and his death and resurrection.

- ▶ Christian theology connected the priesthood of Melchizedek with the priesthood of Jesus.
- ▶ Melchizedek was a mysterious Old Testament figure. He was the king of Salem known also as the king of peace who reached out in friendship to bless and welcome Abraham by offering him bread and wine.
- ▶ Jewish scholarship understood him to be eternal—since he was not in the Torah it was believed he did not exist, thus he transcended history—just as Christ transcended historical time—as the eternal Son of God—Jesus is the Alpha and Omega—yesterday, today and forever.
- ▶ People appeased ancient gods by offering sacrificial gifts hoping that such gifts would abate their anger.
- ▶ Israel, on the other hand, worshiped the One God of Israel—not some vengeful pagan god.
- ▶ The God of Israel was loving, merciful and compassionate.
- ▶ Jewish sacrifices offered to God were extensions of thanks and praise for God's mercy, love and abiding kindness.
- ▶ Priests offered sacrifices in atonement for the sins of the people of Israel.
- ▶ Jesus' sacrifice, however, was offered for all people universally—not just for the people of Israel.
- ▶ The sacrificial offering of his life was atonement for the sins of the entire world.
- ▶ Thus the author of Hebrews affirms Jesus as both sacrifice and high priest.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Why is it important to stress Jesus' humanity?
- ▶ Why is it important to remember that Jesus walked in our shoes?
- ▶ Why is it important in your life to know that Jesus walked in our footsteps?
- ▶ What does Jesus' priesthood have to do with us? Why does it matter?
- ▶ Do you believe that Jesus died for everyone? Who are the people today that we would commonly exclude from his saving love? What would Jesus teach us about such exclusions?

Gospel: Mark 10: 46-52

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please

note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem Mark raises the stakes, supplies mounting tension, and foreshadows Jesus' imminent encounter with his enemies.
- ▶ Mark cleverly weaves his plot. Like a Shakespearean drama the only ones at this point who know Jesus' true identity are the readers and the demons and spirits.
- ▶ The disciples were blind to what and who was right before their very own eyes.
- ▶ They were blind to Jesus' mission and what his messiah-ship meant.
- ▶ Now however as Jesus gets closer and closer to his ultimate destiny he is recognized for who he really is.
- ▶ As Jesus converges on Jericho, Bartimaeus, the blind son of Timaeus, affirms Jesus as Son of David.
- ▶ Jesus healed a blind man at the outset of his journey to Jerusalem and now he heals another blind man at the end of that journey.
- ▶ He began his journey by opening eyes and he ends it doing the same thing—he opened eyes.
- ▶ Yet ironically the disciples are still blind.
- ▶ Bartimaeus is an icon of faith for us. In the midst of his physical blindness and all the discouraging ramifications of that malady—exclusion from the community, status of unclean and dependency on the benevolence of others—he nevertheless professes faith in Christ and pledges committed discipleship.
- ▶ Jesus no longer tries to keep his identity a secret; he allows Bartimaeus his moment of praise and open proclamation of Jesus' identity.
- ▶ One would think that the disciples' blindness would be opened at this time, but there is only a hint that their awareness is coming—not yet, however.
- ▶ More has to transpire for them to get it; events still have to unfold.
- ▶ The story of blind Bartimaeus sets the stage and foreshadows the day when the disciples will finally see. As a neophyte follower of Jesus he is like them, yet different. He gets it.
- ▶ Bartimaeus is the only one who can see and his vision propels him to follow Jesus to Jerusalem where the ultimate battle will be waged.
- ▶ Pilgrims were converging on Jericho a town about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem in their last resting place before entering the Holy City.
- ▶ Readers clutch their throats as the drama heightens and awareness of what lies in wait for Jesus becomes all too immanent and transparent.
- ▶ We are all afraid for Jesus. The disciples, however, not so much.
- ▶ They still enjoy their delusionary imaginings of the Messiah they believed Jesus was.

- ▶ One can hardly blame the disciples for their distorted image of messiah. Solomon himself extols (Ps 17) a future warrior king who delivers Israel from her Gentile enemies and restores the monarchy. If they were blind, they were in good company with their Jewish compatriots as such a messiah was part and parcel of Israel's messianic expectations.
- ▶ Messianic expectations notwithstanding, Mark introduces us to one believer who knows the truth and follows Jesus to his final destination.
- ▶ We follow alongside Bartimaeus as horrified onlooker.
- ▶ Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as the true heir of the Davidic dynasty—the true Messiah, Son of David.
- ▶ Mark affirms Jesus as the realization of the eschatological promises associated with Davidic prophecy.
- ▶ Jesus uses the power and authority derived from his Davidic roots to mercifully heal a blind man.
- ▶ Bartimaeus' healing is a sign of the arrival of the messianic reign as healing of the blind was a prophetic sign of its advent and arrival.
- ▶ Mark brilliantly paints a portrait dripping with irony. At one point Jesus silenced those who were healed and wanted to witness to what he had done; now the crowds try to silence Bartimaeus and keep him from witnessing to Jesus' amazing healing power.
- ▶ No longer are the restrictions of the messianic secret required. Jesus allows the word to go forward. There is no need to keep it secret any longer as all things are now coming to fulfillment.
- ▶ Jesus is amazed by Bartimaeus' faith. Would he be similarly amazed by ours?

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ Further irony presents itself later in Mark's narrative when we encounter a centurion who proclaims Jesus Messiah at the foot of the cross while still the disciples remain blind and in hiding.
- ▶ We are presented with two questions—one last week and the other this week. James and John were looking for earthly benefits and Bartimaeus was seeking spiritual and physical healing.
- ▶ The contrast is clear. The disciples were still concerned about their own worldly self-interests. Bartimaeus wants what Jesus was offering—riches of another nature—salvific and eternal riches. One need not ask who chose the better portion.
- ▶ Bartimaeus asks Jesus to heal him because he knows he can.
- ▶ He knows who Jesus is and the power he possesses.
- ▶ Bartimaeus' faith saved him. Faith and salvation go hand in hand.

- ▶ Bartimaeus this week stands in contrast with the rich young ruler of two weeks ago.
- ▶ The latter cannot let go of his possessions and blind Bartimaeus sheds his only belonging—his cloak, his only means of support—to follow Jesus.
- ▶ Poor beggars spread their cloaks out on the ground to gather the alms given to them.
- ▶ The one from the elite class refused Jesus' invitation and the one from the bottom of society's rung needed no invitation—he eagerly followed without even being asked. He was ready, willing and eager to follow Jesus wherever that would take him—"on the way"--wherever that way would lead—ultimately to Calvary.
- ▶ The reader is made aware of the fulfillment of Mary's Magnificat proclamation—"He puts down the mighty from their seat and exalts the humble and meek. He fills the hungry with good things and the rich he sends away empty."
- ▶ It is often those who have nothing who are the first to recognize Jesus for who he is. The less we have the freer we are to see what needs to be seen—distractions are stripped away and we are free to focus on what is essential—our life in Christ—intimacy and total communion with his Father and awareness of the Spirit who lives within.
- ▶ The last are finally and truly first and the first are ultimately last. Where do we stand—last or first?



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ Where does blindness exist in your own life?
- ▶ In what way if any have you had the experience of being healed from your blindness?
- ▶ What keeps most of us blind?
- ▶ What did Bartimaeus see that the disciples could not see?
- ▶ Why was he able to see?
- ▶ Bartimaeus was so overwhelmed he followed Jesus to Jerusalem, how willing are you to follow Jesus to the cross?
- ▶ Jesus is amazed by Bartimaeus' faith. Would he be similarly amazed by yours?
- ▶ The last are finally and truly first and the first are ultimately last. Where do we stand—last or first? How would you respond to that question? What does it mean

to you? What are the implications for our lives?

- ▶ What are the challenges and implications of this reading for a parish community? Where does blindness exist in your community? Who receives the greatest attention in our midst--the poor blind beggars or the rich young rulers?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Prayer for Generosity

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Eternal Word,

only begotten Son of God,

Teach me true generosity.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve.

To give without counting the cost,

To fight heedless of wounds,

To labor without seeking rest,

To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward

Save the knowledge that I have done your will.

Amen.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

➤ Where does blindness exist in your own life?

Bartimaeus is an icon for me to discern where blindness exists in my own life. It is easy for me to think I always have the absolute truth and dismiss it in others. Yet, like James and John in last week's gospel, I find that I am, in truth, really blind. I think of the times that I dismiss the opinion of others with whom I disagree arrogantly assuming that my truth is the right one. How can two God-loving, committed Christians have two absolutely different opinions of how the world works? I often dismiss the differing visions as antithetical to what I believe the Gospel is teaching. Yet, when I sit back and seriously bring the other perspective into view I come to realize that God is in both perspectives. He leaves it for us to work out with one another in mutual love and common respect for the dignity of one another.

One thing is clear: hatred, disunity and demonizing those with differing perspectives are hardly what Jesus' had in mind for the kingdom he inaugurated. There is never room for denigrating and demonizing those who do not believe as we do.

I was struck by a posting on social media recently by someone close to my family that in one breath completely and totally condemned a certain segment of our society and assured the world that they were indeed damned to hell and just to make sure they did not appear hateful and judgmental (because Jesus would not like that) affirmed that of course they loved such people, they just hated their sin. Really? How can a person in one sentence condemn someone to eternal damnation and in the next affirm that person as loved? Their behavior is a reminder to me that I too could fall into a similar trap of self-righteous indignation and be so assured on my own need to be right that I fail to see Jesus' compassion calling me to become more fully transformed into his image and to leave the judging to him.

A word about the poor blind beggar and what he has to teach our communities today. It is obvious that he had no material wealth to distract him from following Christ. It is so easy to get caught up in the material aspects of life that we are distracted from the faith to which we are called in today's Gospel. I include a posting in my Word and Worship Workbook (Year B) series for this week's reflection: "I am most impressed, however, with our sister parish in Peru, which, in the midst of its own abject poverty, tithes ten percent of its income to an even poorer parish in Africa and sends missionaries over there to help them. They truly live the spirit of today's gospel. They are the living incarnation of the healed, blind Bartimaeus. They know that everything they have flows from the grace of God. They receive in graciousness and in turn cast their garment to the wind and follow the Lord in faith. I am sure the ten percent they send to Africa is an incredible hardship for them, yet they humbly wish to follow the Lord in faith. Like Bartimaeus, they have true vision. They know their poverty before God and are blessed by the abundance they have been given. They trust in God's providence--and look how God blessed them. God sent them us! (We are similarly blessed, by the way!) Our parish has built two clinics in their parish and is in the process of helping them build a new church.

Our association in the Lord continues.” (Word and Worship Workbook Year B by Mary Birmingham, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Paulist Press)

I am in a different parish now and it is eight years later. I am once again blessed to be in a parish that has a similar commitment to the poor in our midst and around the world. Our parish gives a half million dollars a year to the world’s poor. Is there room for growth? Of course, but we try to live the spirit of today’s Gospel. We try to see the Blind Bartimaeus in our midst.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 31: 7-9 | Hebrews 5: 1-6 | Mark 10: 46-52

Scripture and Revelation

Anointing of the Sick

Sacraments

Faith

*Eschatology: Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory*

Saints

Morality

Moral Decision Making

Life Issues

Mary Model for the Church

Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SCRIPTURE and REVELATION

The disciples in today's Gospel were the ones who walked with Jesus, the revelation of God, but they were blind to it. Jesus is the sacrament of God; he is the revelation of God. Scripture continues to open us further to that revelation. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about **SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION**.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Bartimaeus asks to be healed from the One he knows can give it. Jesus heals the blind Bartimaeus in his ministry of healing and reconciliation. That ministry continues in the Church today through the **SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK**. It is fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**.

SACRAMENTS

Bartimaeus asks to be healed from the One he knows can give it. Jesus heals the blind Bartimaeus in his ministry of healing and reconciliation. That ministry continues in the Church today through the sacraments of the Church. The sacraments continue Jesus' ministry of love, healing and reconciliation. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on the **SACRAMENTS**.

FAITH

Jesus is awed by the faith of Bartimaeus who asked to be healed from the One he knew could give it. We are all called to similar faith. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about **FAITH**.

ESCHATOLOGY: HEAVEN, HELL and PURGATORY

Since the liturgical year is slowly winding down and coming to the end and Jesus is on the final road to Jerusalem the focus will turn to last things and end times and the afterlife. We are slowly coming to the end of the liturgical year. There are only four Sundays left. The closer we get to the end of the year, the more we hear about the culmination of the Jesus' earthly ministry. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: HEAVEN, HELL and PURGATORY

SAINTS

In these last days of the liturgical cycle we focus on the communion of saints—the saints on earth and the saints in heaven that share the eschatological banquet in the Eucharist. November first is the Feast of All Saints. During this latter part of the liturgical cycle we focus our attention on the communion of saints and those who have gone before us. It is thus a proper time for us to focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about the SAINTS.

MORALITY

The gospels continue to stress what it means to live according to gospel values in the kingdom of God. Week after week Jesus instructs his disciples on the implications of living in the reign of God. The disciples do not always understand. It is clear that living in the kingdom requires righteous—read moral- living. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on Christian MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

The gospels continue to stress what it means to live according to gospel values in the kingdom of God. Week after week Jesus instructs his disciples on the implications of living in the reign of God. The disciples do not always understand. It is clear that living in the kingdom requires righteous—read moral- living. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

LIFE ISSUES

One cannot consider Jesus' teaching regarding the kingdom and not be attentive to life issues. We have a responsibility to safeguard life from womb to tomb. It is a matter of living God's covenant of love. We are to respect all life as sacred. If we are to love our neighbor—which includes everyone—then we must uphold the dignity of every person. In order to uphold that dignity we can do no less than safeguard life to the fullest from womb to tomb. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session today on LIFE ISSUES.

MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

October is the month we remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.